DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 281 PS 026 817

AUTHOR	Anderman, Lynley Hicks; Midgley, Carol
TITLE	Motivation and Middle School Students. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Champaign, IL.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-PS-98-5
PUB DATE	1998-06-00
NOTE	3p.
CONTRACT	RR93001007
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Attribution Theory; Classroom Environment; *Early Adolescents; Goal Orientation; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Motivation Techniques; Personal Autonomy; Self Determination; Student Attitudes; *Student Motivation; Teacher Expectations of Students; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods; Theories
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *Middle School Students; Middle School Teachers; Task Goal Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Research has shown a decline in motivation and performance for many children as they move from elementary school into middle school; however, research has also shown that the nature of motivational change on entry to middle school depends on characteristics of the learning environment in which students find themselves. This Digest outlines some suggestions for middle school teachers and administrators for enhancing student motivation and discusses three theories that are currently prominent and that have particular relevance for young adolescent students and their teachers. Attribution theory emphasizes that students' perceptions of their educational experiences generally influence their motivation more than the objective reality of those experiences. Through instructional practices, teachers can unknowingly communicate a range of attitudes about whether ability is fixed or modifiable and convey their expectations for individual students. Goal theory focuses on the reasons students perceive for achieving: a task goal orientation represents the belief that the purpose of achieving is personal improvement and understanding; an ability goal orientation represents the belief that the purpose of achieving is the demonstration of ability. Studies find that the adoption of task goals is associated with more adaptive patterns of learning than is the adoption of ability goals. A third motivational theory of importance for middle school educators is self-determination theory. This theory describes students as having three categories of needs: needing a sense of competence, of relatedness to others, and of autonomy. Most of the research focuses on the last of these three needs. Within the classroom, autonomy needs could be addressed through allowing student choice and input on classroom decision making. It is important to recognize that supporting student autonomy does not require major upheaval in the classroom or that teachers relinquish the management of students' behavior. Even small opportunities for choice can increase students' sense of self-determination. Contains 13 references. (LPP)

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

University of Illinois • 51 Gerty Drive • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
(217) 333-1386 • (800) 583-4135 (Voice/TTY) • ericeece@uiuc.edu

ERIC DIGEST
June 1998 • EDO-PS-98-5

ED 421 281

Motivation and Middle School Students

Lynley Hicks Anderman and Carol Midgley

Few educators would argue with the premise that student motivation is an important influence on learning. Motivation is of particular importance for those who work with young adolescents. Considerable research has shown a decline in motivation and performance for many children as they move from elementary school into middle school (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Often it has been assumed that this decline is largely caused by physiological and psychological changes associated with puberty and, therefore, is somewhat inevitable. This assumption has been challenged, however, by research that demonstrates that the nature of motivational change on entry to middle school depends on characteristics of the learning environment in which students find themselves (Midgley, 1993). Although it is difficult to prescribe a "one size fits all" approach to motivating students, research suggests that some general patterns do appear to hold true for a wide range of students. This Digest outlines some suggestions for middle school teachers and administrators for enhancing student motivation, and discusses three theories that are currently prominent and that have particular relevance for young adolescent students and their teachers.

Attribution Theory

The first point to be emphasized is that students' *perceptions* of their educational experiences generally influence their motivation more than the actual, objective reality of those experiences. For example, a history of success in a given subject area is generally assumed to lead one to continue persisting in that area. Weiner (1985), however, pointed out that students' beliefs about the reasons for their success will determine whether this assumption is true. Students' attributions for failure are also important influences on motivation. When students have a history of failure in school, it is particularly difficult for them to sustain the motivation to keep trying. Students who believe that their poor performance is caused by factors out of their control are unlikely to see any reason to hope for an improvement. In contrast, if students attribute their poor performance to a lack of important skills or to poor study habits, they are more likely to persist in the future. The implications for teachers revolve around the importance of understanding what students believe about the reasons for their academic performance. Teachers can unknowingly communicate a range of attitudes about whether ability is fixed or modifiable and their expectations for individual students through their instructional practices (Graham, 1990).

Goal Theory

While attribution theory focuses on the reasons students perceive for their successes and failures in school, goal theory focuses on the reasons or purposes students perceive for achieving (e.g., Ames, 1992; Maehr & Midgley, 1991; Midgley, 1993). While different researchers define the constructs slightly differently, two main goal orientations are generally discussed. These are task goals and ability goals. A task goal orientation represents the belief that the purpose of achieving is personal improvement and understanding. Students with a task goal orientation focus on their own progress in mastering skills and knowledge, and they define success in those terms. An ability goal orientation represents the belief that the purpose of achieving is the demonstration of ability (or, alternatively, the concealment of a lack of ability). Students with an ability goal orientation focus on appearing competent, often in comparison to others, and define success accordingly. Studies of students' goal orientations generally find that the adoption of task goals is associated with more adaptive patterns of learning than is the adoption of ability goals, including the use of more effective cognitive strategies, a willingness to seek help when it is needed, a greater tendency to engage in challenging tasks, and more positive feelings about school and oneself as a learner (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley, 1997).

If adopting a task goal orientation is related to positive educational outcomes for students, the question then arises as to how such an orientation can be fostered. Recent studies suggest that the policies and practices in classrooms and schools influence students' goal orientations (Ames & Archer, 1988; Maehr & Midgley, 1991). Specific suggestions (Midgley & Urdan, 1992, p. 12) for moving toward a task focus in middle schools include moving away from:

1. grouping by ability and over-use of standardized tests to grouping by topic, interest, and student choice and to frequent reformation of groups;
2. competition between students, and contests with limited winners, to cooperative learning;
3. using test data as a basis for comparison to using test data for diagnosis and to alternatives to tests such as portfolios;
4. normative grading and public display of grades to grading for progress or improvement and involving students in determining their grades;
5. recognition for relative performance, honor rolls for high grades, and over-use of praise (especially for easy tasks) to recognition of progress improvement and an emphasis on learning for its own sake;
6. decisions made exclusively by administrators and teachers to opportunities for choice and student decision making, self-scheduling, and self-regulation;

PS 026817

7. departmentalized approach to curriculum to thematic approaches/interdisciplinary focus, viewing mistakes as a part of learning, allowing students to redo work, and encouraging students to take academic risks;
8. rote learning and memorization, over-use of worksheets and textbooks, and decontextualized facts to providing challenging, complex work to students, giving homework that is enriching, and encouraging problem solving and comprehension;
9. pull-out programs and retention to cross-age tutoring, or peer tutoring, and enrichment.

Self-Determination Theory

A third motivational theory of particular importance for middle school educators is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This theory describes students as having three categories of needs: needing a sense of competence, of relatedness to others, and of autonomy. Competence involves understanding how to, and believing that one can, achieve various outcomes. Relatedness involves developing satisfactory connections to others in one's social group. Autonomy involves initiating and regulating one's own actions. Most of the research in self-determination theory focuses on the last of these three needs. Within the classroom, autonomy needs could be addressed through allowing some student choice and input on classroom decision making. For young adolescent students, with their increased cognitive abilities and developing sense of identify, a sense of autonomy may be particularly important. Students at this stage say that they want to be included in decision making and to have some sense of control over their activities. Unfortunately, research suggests that students in middle schools actually experience fewer opportunities for self-determination than they did in elementary school (Midgley & Feldlaufer, 1987).

Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) summarized contextual factors that support student autonomy. Features such as the provision of choice over what types of tasks to engage in and how much time to allot to each are associated with students' feelings of self-determination. In contrast, the use of extrinsic rewards, the imposition of deadlines, and an emphasis on evaluations detract from a feeling of self-determination and lead to a decrease in intrinsic motivation. It is important to recognize that supporting student autonomy does not require major upheaval in the classroom or that teachers relinquish the management of students' behavior. Even small opportunities for choice, such as whether to work with a partner or independently, or whether to present a book review as a paper, poster, or class presentation, can increase students' sense of self-determination. Finally, it is important to recognize that students' early attempts at regulating their own work may not always be successful. Good decision making and time management require practice. Teachers can help their students develop their self-regulation by providing limited choices between acceptable options, by assisting with breaking large tasks into manageable pieces, and by providing guidelines for students to use in monitoring their own progress.

Conclusion

Middle school teachers often teach many students over the course of a school day, and for a relatively short period of time. Given such brief contact with so many, it is easy to underestimate the influence that one's teaching practices can have on any one individual. Current moves to implement the middle school philosophy may provide a more facilitative schedule for both teachers and students, but even in a highly structured middle school, teachers can take specific steps to provide a learning environment that will promote the motivation of all students.

Adapted from: Anderman, L. H., & Midgley, C. (1997). Motivation and middle school students. In Judith L. Irvin (Ed.), What current research says to the middle level practitioner (pp. 41-48). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

For More Information

Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structures, and student motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 84*(3), 261-271. EJ 452 395.

Ames, C., & Archer, J. (1988). Achievement goals in the classroom: Students' learning strategies and motivation processes. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 80*(3), 260-267. EJ 388 054.

Anderman, E. M., & Maehr, M. L. (1994). Motivation and schooling in the middle grades. *Review of Educational Research, 64*(2), 287-309. EJ 488 853.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* New York: Plenum.

Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. U., Pelletier, L. G., & Ryan, R. M. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational psychologist, 26*(3/4), 325-346.

Eccles, J. S., & Midgley, C. (1989). Stage/environment fit: Developmentally appropriate classrooms for early adolescents. In R. E. Ames & C. Ames (Eds.), *Research on motivation in education* (Vol. 3, pp. 139-186). New York: Academic.

Graham, S. (1990). Communicating low ability in the classroom: Bad things good teachers sometimes do. In S. Graham and V. Folkes (Eds.), *Attribution theory: Applications to achievement, mental health, and interpersonal conflict* (pp. 17-36). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Maehr, M. L., & Midgley, C. (1991). Enhancing student motivation: A schoolwide approach. *Educational Psychologist, 26*(3/4), 399-427.

Midgley, C. (1993). Motivation and middle level schools. In P. R. Pintrich & M. L. Maehr (Eds.), *Advances in motivation and achievement, Vol. 8: Motivation in the adolescent years* (pp. 219-276). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Midgley, C., & Feldlaufer, H. (1987). Students' and teachers' decision-making fit before and after the transition to junior high school. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 7*(2), 225-241.

Midgley, C., & Urdan, T. C. (1992). The transition to middle level schools: Making it a good experience for all students. *Middle School Journal, 24*(2), 5-14. EJ 454 359.

Ryan, A. M., Hicks, L., & Midgley, C. (1997). Social goals, academic goals, and avoiding seeking help in the classroom. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 17*(2), 152-171.

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review, 92*(4), 548-573. EJ 324 684.

References identified with an ED (ERIC document), EJ (ERIC journal), or PS number are cited in the ERIC database. Most documents are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 1,000 locations worldwide and can be ordered through EDRS: (800) 443-ERIC. Journal articles are available from the original journal, interlibrary loan services, or article reproduction clearinghouses such as: UnCover (800) 787-7979, UMI (800) 732-0616, or ISI (800) 523-1850.

This publication was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. DERR93002007. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced.